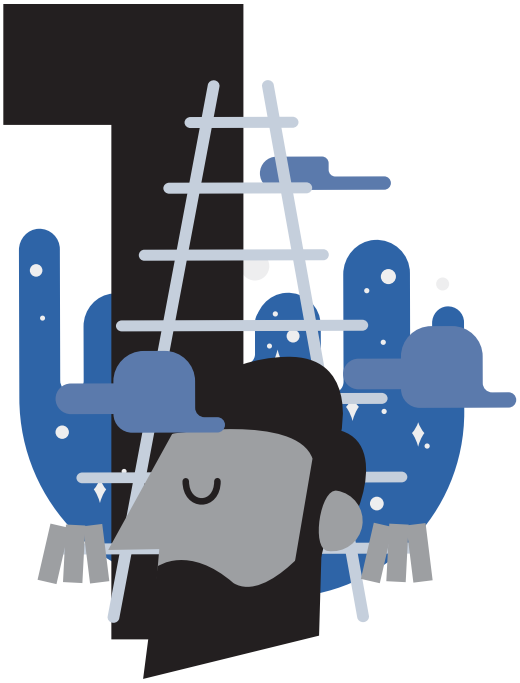


Unit .03

Session .01

# God's Mercy to a Deceiver

## Scripture

## Genesis 27:18-20,25-29

**18** When he came to his father, he said, "My father." And he answered, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" **19** Jacob replied to his father, "I am Esau, your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may bless me." **20** But Isaac said to his son, "How did you ever find it so quickly, my son?" He replied, "Because the LORD your God made it happen for me." … **25** Then he said, "Bring it closer to me, and let me eat some of my son's game so that I can bless you." Jacob brought it closer to him, and he ate; he brought him wine, and he drank. **26** Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come closer and kiss me, my son." **27** So he came closer and kissed him. When Isaac smelled his clothes, he blessed him and said: Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. **28** May God give to you—from the dew of the sky and from the richness of the land—an abundance of grain and new wine. **29** May peoples serve you and nations bow in worship to you. Be master over your relatives; may your mother's sons bow in worship to you. Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed"

## Intro Options

**Main Point:**
**God is merciful to use even the most unlikely people to build His kingdom.**

## Option 1

On social media it isn't unusual to see #blessed or #blessings in all kinds of posts. Sometimes the phrase is used to talk about a gift or opportunity, and other times it's used sarcastically.

- **When have you seen someone post something with #blessed?**
- **When have you posted something with #blessed?**

Although we use the word *blessed* all the time to describe our lives, we may not understand the true definition. Place students in groups, give them a poster board and marker, and allow two minutes for them to write out their own definition of the word *blessed*. At the two minute mark, regroup and read their definitions. Then, give students the following definition: A *blessing* is a *declaration of divine favor or asking for divine favor on someone or something.* Today, we will study the word *blessing* as we read about Isaac asking God to bless Jacob.

## Option 2

Group students into small teams. Provide each team with a small poster board and markers. Challenge them to write out as many "powerful" words as they can think of—and they will only have three minutes to do this. "Powerful" words are words that cause strong emotions. For example, words like *love* and *hate*.

After allowing time for discussion, ask teams to share their responses. Today's study will show us just how powerful words can be in our lives.

- **Think about a time words have affected you recently. How have the blessed you, encouraged you, or given you hope? How have they hurt you, discouraged you, or made you afraid?**

Words can be used to bless or to curse, as Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." We have to pay attention to our words in every way, because even what we hear influences the way we speak to and treat others.

# TEACHING PLAN

Esau was the oldest son and would have normally received the family blessing and birthright, but God chose Jacob to receive the promises given to Abraham instead (Gen. 25:23). Yet, near the end of his life, Isaac planned to give Esau the patriarchal blessing rather than Jacob. In the first part of Genesis 27 (vv. 1-10), we see just how much dysfunctional of a family Isaac and Rebekah had. Taking advantage of Isaac's poor eye sight and Esau's absence, Rebekah and Jacob initiated a plan that would allow Jacob to receive the blessing intended for his brother.

**Read Genesis 27:18-20, 25-29.**

After Jacob put their plan into action and lied to his father directly, Isaac ate, drank, and then blessed his son. The aging father gave Jacob a four-part blessing: Jacob was granted an abundance of grain and wine, dominion over their family and other nations, and curses for those who curse him and blessings for those who bless him. This echoed God's covenant with Abraham.

- **When have you been guilty of changing the truth (even just a little) to get something you wanted? How did that work out?**

## Activity

Lead students to play *Two Truths and a Lie*. In this game, each student will share two truths and one lie about themselves. The other students will have to identify which statements are true and which is the lie. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to place students into two to four groups so everyone has a chance to go. It isn't always easy to spot the truth, and sometimes we're afraid of fully telling the truth because of others' reactions. Sometimes we lie to get what we want, much like Jacob lied to his father to receive the blessing that would have gone to his brother, Esau.

Once the blessing was given, Jacob left Isaac and Esau immediately arrived—seemingly missing the blessing ceremony by minutes. When Isaac and Esau learn of Jacob's deceit, Isaac reacted visibly—trembling uncontrollably—in his distress (v. 33). Esau cried out bitterly for a blessing his father couldn't give and vowed to kill his brother (v. 41). Jacob's ruse worked, but had disastrous consequences. Although God's prophecy was fulfilled through Jacob's actions, there are always repercussions to such ungodly behavior.

- **Do you think Jacob was right in what he did? How could he have approached the situation differently?**

Instead of relying on the Lord to fulfill the promise in His own time, in His own way, and through His own power, Rebekah and Jacob took matters into their own hands. They did not even approach Isaac and try to reason with him. Though Rebekah and Jacob valued the blessing of God, they did not value the ways of God.

- **What are some examples in life where you have tried to do things your own way in your own time?**

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**God is merciful to use even the most unlikely people to build His kingdom.**

## Genesis 27

**18-20.** When we read this account and future accounts of Jacob's life, many of us want to say, "Wait a minute. Stop. This is all wrong. None of these people deserve God's blessing! Especially not Jacob. Esau didn't seem to care about spiritual matters, but at least he wasn't a deceiver." Genesis paints an unflattering picture of Abraham and his offspring. They lie, cheat, and manipulate. Abraham and Isaac both claimed their wives were their sisters to take the heat off themselves (Gen. 12:11-13; 26:7). Isaac played favorites with his son Esau, while Rebekah's favorite was Jacob. Rebekah and Jacob were willing to deceive to get what they wanted.

Yes, Jacob was a deceiver. Just like his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham. Three generations into the nation God was building and we have yet to find a patriarch who seems right for the part. If anything, it seems like the story is moving backward. Why did God allow the blessing to come through a man like Jacob?

God delights in using the ordinary, the weak and flawed, for His redemptive purposes He receives all the credit and glory. When we look at patriarchs—and things like Jacob's heartless deception and manipulation—we walk away shaking our heads at how God could bring about good through those who acted so sinfully. We do not celebrate sin, but we celebrate a God who brings beauty even from the ashes of our lives.

Jacob was unworthy. Isaac was unworthy. Abraham was unworthy. And that's the point. We are all unworthy to receive God's blessings and to be used by Him. God's mercy and grace are on display in this passage, not man's worthiness. We cling to that mercy and grace, recognizing our unworthiness before a holy God and God's kindness to pour out His mercy and grace upon us without measure through Christ Jesus.

## 99 Essential Doctrines *(p.88, DDG)*

### God is Merciful

Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

# TEACHING PLAN

Isaac finally blessed Jacob without the need for trickery or manipulation (Gen. 28:1-9). Isaac embraced Jacob as the one who would carry on the covenant of Abraham. Yet, Jacob had to leave his family and live in exile because of his brother's wrath. This terrible situation was partial a result of Rebekah and Jacob's deception, yet deception continued as s Rebekah encouraged Isaac to send Jacob away to find a wife rather than deal directly with the threat on Jacob's life.

**Read Genesis 28:10-15.**

- **How would you expect God to respond to Jacob because of his lies? How did God respond?**

These verses record the first time God spoke to Jacob. We might expect God to rebuke Jacob's manipulative and deceptive past behaviors or to warn Jacob about the consequences of his actions. God's chosen ones are to live holy and pure. Instead of encountering God's wrath like we might expect, Jacob experienced God's gentle mercy just like Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob's vision of a stairway or ladder receives plenty of attention. The stairway with "its top reaching the sky" (v. 12) reminds us of the "tower with its top in the sky" that a prior generation wanted to construct in Babylon (Gen. 11:4). But there is a remarkable twist. In Babylon, the people were attempting to reach up into the sky to make a name for themselves. Here, the stairway was not made by human effort but given by God's revelation. Rather than humanity working their way to God, Jacob's stairway reminds us that God is merciful and gracious as He reaches down to sinful humanity to make Himself known.

- **How do you think God's mercy and promise to use Jacob to fulfill His promises encouraged him?**

This account takes us back to Genesis 11, and also takes us straight to Jesus and the call of Nathanael (John 14:5-51). Here we learn that the stairway represents God reaching down to humanity and brings about His redemptive purposes, and the stairway itself was the Son of Man—Jesus. God came into the world through Jesus Christ, providing blessing for all—salvation as a means of restored relationship with God. And He did that for us, while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). God extended mercy to Jacob in abundance; yet through Christ, He has showered us with mercy in superabundance. Jacob's story should not cause jealousy in our hearts, but a humble gratitude because we know that we were just as undeserving when we received unmatched mercy and grace in Christ.

- **If someone asked you about the meaning of Jacob's vision, how would you respond?**
- **How can you use this Old Testament example to point others to Jesus and the gospel?**

# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**
**God is merciful to use even the most unlikely people to build His kingdom.**

## Genesis 28

**12.** Scholars debate which word best describes what Jacob saw and exactly where the Lord was standing: at the top of ladder or next to Jacob (in accordance with differing translations). These are reasonable questions to ask and explore. However, we need to be careful not to lose sight of the more important point of the stairway itself and what it represented.

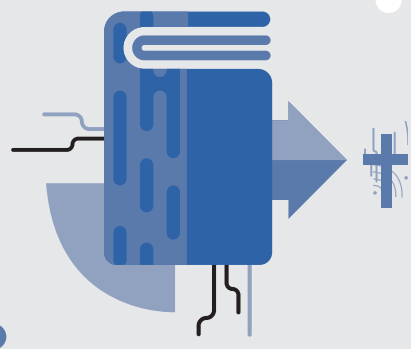
**12-14.** There is another aspect of this vision that parallels the Tower of Babylon and further reveals God's mercy. God revealed Himself to Jacob and reaffirmed the threefold promise of the covenant He initiated with Abraham—land, descendants, and blessing. But God used an interesting phrase to describe Jacob's descendants: "Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south" (v. 14a). In Babylon, the people set out to build their tower so they would not be spread out: "Let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth" (11:4b).

The people in Babylon disobeyed when they built a tower to reach into the sky in defiance of God's commands. But in Jacob's disobedience, God showed him a stairway reaching into the sky to reveal Himself and reaffirm that God would use him to fulfill His promises, ultimately leading to blessing for all families of the earth. What an act of mercy! What an act of grace! This is exactly what Jacob needed to know in this moment of uncertainty and it is what we need to remember in our time as well.

**15.** Jacob would eventually become the representative head of the nation of Israel, and Israel was called to be a light to the nations. God's redeeming plan would go through Jacob to all the nations of the earth. The saving line would come through the deceitful younger son, Jacob, not Esau.

## *(p. 90, DDG)* Christ Connection

Jacob's stairway gives us a glimpse into the reversal of Babel. The people of Babel were trying to reach God by lifting up a tower, and it caused them to be dispersed all over the planet. But when the offspring of Jacob, God incarnate—Jesus of Nazareth—came down from heaven, He would be lifted up to draw all people to Himself. He would bless all the peoples of the earth and reunite them in Himself. John told us that Jesus is the true stairway to heaven (1:51). He is the One who reconnects earth and heaven.



# GOD'S MERCY TO A DECEIVER

Genesis 28:18–20, 25–29

## GOD'S MERCY TO A DECEIVER

God is merciful to use even the most unlikely people to build His kingdom.

## JESUS CONNECTION

The people of Babel tried to build a tower to reach God, but humans can never reach God on their own. Instead, Jacob's stairway shows that God, in His mercy, planned to reach down to us. He sent Jesus, the true stairway to Heaven (John 1:51). Through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus is the only way back to God the Father (John 14:6).

## LIFEWISE QUALITY

MERCY – Choosing not to punish someone who deserves to be punished.

## HEAD

What was the result of the deception in Genesis 27? Why did God allow it to happen?

How did God offer mercy to Jacob?

## HEART

How do you want to respond when you find out someone lied or deceived you? Why? How do you want others to respond to you when they discover you lied or deceived them? Why?

How do you feel when someone shows mercy to you and doesn't give you what you deserve? Name someone who has done that for you.

## HANDS

Think of situations in your circle of friends, your school or your house where someone has done something to you that they should be called out for. Now, think of what it would be like to show them mercy. What would others think? Could this be an opportunity to act the opposite way the world expects? Find a way to show mercy this week, the way God showed mercy to Jacob and to us.